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REFLECTIONS

UPON THE

COMMENCEMENT

OF A

NEW YEAR.

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BRITISH MUSEUM

TO THE INHABITANTS OF BURWASH,

A PLEASANT VILLAGE IN THE WEALD OF SUSSEX,

AT WHICH HE FOR SOME YEARS RESIDED

AS THEIR MINISTER,

THE FOLLOWING REFLECTIONS ARE INSCRIBED

BY THEIR AUTHOR,

AS A TRIFLING TESTIMONY OF HIS RESPECT,

AND AS A MEMORIAL OF THE REGRET WHICH

HE EXPERIENCED

IN BEING PARTED FROM THEM.

BRITISH MUSEUM

REFLECTIONS, &c.

THERE is nothing we ſo frequently complain of, as the ſhortneſs of life. Every man, at ſome ſeaſon or another, becomes ſenſible of the flight of time, and bewails the ſcantineſs of that portion of it which falls to his own ſhare. Thus we hear men complain that *our days are but a ſpan long*, and that we bring them to an end *like a tale that is told*. Man himſelf is compared *to a vapor that vaniſhes*,

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to a ſhadow that paſſes away, to a flower which in the morning is in full beauty, but in the evening *is cut down, dried up, and withered.* We hear his exiſtence likened to nothing more than a mere day—at beſt to a ſhort year, whoſe ſeaſons are ſoon brought to an end, and then we are *even as a ſleep and fade away ſuddenly like the graſs.*

It muſt indeed be acknowledged that the days of man are few and ſhort. Threeſcore and ten years are generally the utmoſt limit of his being. Some may paſs beyond that period, but by far the greater part of mankind are never able to reach it. And of the years in which we live, nearly one half is always ſpent in inſenſibility and ſleep; in acquiring that reſt, without which the human conſtitution could not ſupport itſelf even to this term. So that the real time of life, the time in which a man is ſenſible of his being, falls within a very limited and

narrow ſpace indeed. And of this how much are we obliged to beſtow, on the unavoidable cares and wants of human nature; in providing food and raiment for theſe periſhable bodies, whoſe ſhort exiſtence hardly makes them worthy of ſo much concern. After all, very little time can be left for cultivating the more important duties of religion, and preparing ourſelves for that world which is to come hereafter.

It might be expected then, that of theſe few and precious moments, we ſhould make the beſt uſe: that we ſhould embrace them with joy and thankfulneſs, and ſpend them with the ſtricteſt attention to prudence and œconomy. But though life be ſo ſhort, and opportunities of amendment ſo few, there is nothing of which we are more prodigal than of *Time*. Every moment that can be trifled away, never fails to be ſquandered and miſapplied. Of the riches of the world we

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are ſometimes tenacious, and uſe them with culpable reluctance, but here, where parſimony in the utmoſt extreme would be beneficial, we are ever given to be profuſe and extravagant. The hours of leiſure and retirement are calmly dedicated to idleneſs and inaction, to vain and unprofitable amuſements, or perhaps to a laviſh and criminal indulgence of our appetites and paſſions. The genius of man is continually engaged in the invention of expedients to beguile time. Thus, while we lament the ſhortneſs of our being, we endeavour to make it ſtill ſhorter by contrivance; and are never more happy, than when we have hurried away a conſiderable portion of it, without being ſenſible of its departure.

I would not be thought to diſcountenance amuſements which are innocent. There is a time for recreation and pleaſure, as well as for the more important

duties

duties of life. And when the latter have been firſt duly diſcharged, we may indulge ourſelves in a rational and moderate purſuit of the former, without fear from the diſpleaſure of Heaven. And then are they much to be preferred to idleneſs, and to the too common practice of ſpending every moment to be ſpared in the purſuit of ſenſual enjoyments. But when amuſements become the only buſineſs of life, when they ſet aſide and preclude the improvement of the mind, and treſpaſs upon hours which ought to be dedicated to more uſeful employment, it is then that, though innocent in themſelves, they become ſcandalous and criminal. We have much to do before we depart out of this world, and when we have made the moſt of time, we are taught to ſay that we are ſtill but *unprofitable ſervants*. Yet ought we ſurely to do what we are able, though it be ſo mean and trifling. Were a man to

give up every ſpare hour of his life to ſome good work, he could not do more than would be uſeful to him, or more than it was his duty to perform. But how different is the practice of the world! We ſuffer day after day, and year after year to eſcape us, and ſtill put off till to-morrow our purpoſed reformation. So is it that we often paſs through life without merit; and all that is remembered of us here, and perhaps all that is worthy to be recorded of us in Heaven, is that we lived and that we died.

Let reflection only extend its ſcrutiny over that portion of time, which falls the neareſt within our remembrance. Of the year which has juſt left us, what days are to be diſtinguiſhed from the reſt, for the wiſe and prudent manner in which they were ſpent? Some opportunities perhaps may have been rightly employed, but how few are they in

reſpect

reſpect of thoſe which have been neglected and loſt! Very rare are the moments memory is able to recall, which deſerve to be recorded for works of diligence and induſtry, and for ſober and ſerious application to the knowledge and practice of virtue. Scarce an hour is to be remembered, in which we have not betrayed a cold indifference, or at beſt but a feeble and ſpiritleſs attachment, to every thing that is commendable and good.

And what are our reſolutions, if we look forward from the preſent moment, and conſider the days which are yet to come? To what good uſe have we purpoſed to apply every future opportunity of doing well? What part of that life, which we preſume God will yet beſtow upon us, have we determined to employ in a more laudable manner than the years which are paſt? I fear, if we look into our own boſoms, we

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ſhall not find them inhabited by many virtuous intentions. We live as if we were to be always confined upon the ſurface of this world, and, as if the day of death was never to overtake us. We become careleſs and negligent in the firſt hours of life, and contract habits of inactivity which never after forſake us. And what are the conſequences of ſuch indolence? Death is very ſeldom for a long interval abſent from us. One man is carried to his grave, and after a very ſmall portion of time another follows him. So are we taken unawares, and go down into the chambers of darkneſs before we have well begun to live.

Contemplate the events of the laſt year only. It will furniſh many affecting proofs of the uncertainty of life. At the commencement of it, Religion was deprived of one of its ableſt advocates, and learning of one of its beſt ornaments, by the death of

Horne

Horne Biſhop of Norwich. To the author of theſe reflections he was perſonally known. He may venture to ſay he was his friend and benefactor; for he enjoys at this moment a ſtation of eaſe to which the Biſhop was inſtrumental in raiſing him, and has in his poſſeſſion letters of private approbation and encouragement from his Lordſhip, which have made him amends for many a weary hour of ſtudious reſearch. He was a Chriſtian, and he was a Gentleman. Moderation and good humour always attended him. A more reſpected Officer never ſat in the Chancellor's chair, nor left it with louder applauſe from the Univerſity over which he had preſided. To the pulpit he was always followed with eſteem, and was heard with attention and delight. In ſhort, as a Preacher and as a Father, as a Preſident and as a Vice-Chancellor, as a Dean and as a Biſhop, no man could have been more honoured, or more deſerving of the honour which purſued him.

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The year *ninety-two* has alſo proved fatal to the great names of Rodney, North, and Burgoyne. And let me not overlook the diſtreſſing event which, in the beginning of its autumn, fell upon the author of theſe reflections. When he firſt became ſenſible of his introduction into life, he found in the cradle beſide him an infant ſiſter, whoſe diſpoſition was congenial with his own, and whom he had no ſooner ſeen than he loved. At her ſide he grew, and eſteem grew with him. Affection was mutual and it was ardent. It was with lingering regret that he left her, to paſs through the ſeveral ſtages of education, but with the moſt lively ſatisfaction that he returned to ſpend his vacations at home. Happy did he deem himſelf, when no farther reſtraint was laid upon him, when Tuition had cloſed her lecture, and he was permitted to dedicate all his moments to domeſtic enjoyment. By his affectionate companion he ſat down contented,

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and envied no man his happineſs, ſatisfied with the amplitude of his own. With her he continued his purſuits, and ſhe poſſeſſed herſelf of all the fruits of his labour. Surely no man living was more bleſſed, and no man had more cauſe to be wretched when ſhe was taken away from him. Dear girl, thou art gone, and thy grave has been ſprinkled with my tears. My tears are thine at this moment, and what is life but impriſonment without thee? I will ſit by thy grave and lament thee. I will come down to thee when my hour is accompliſhed. I will fondly decorate the ſpot where thou art placed, and every flower which thy eye approved, ſhall grow near it. I will not doubt but that we ſhall ſome day meet again, and perceive that even in this ſevere diſpenſation there is goodneſs and mercy.

Nor was this the only loſs experienced by the author of theſe reflections, in the courſe

of the year juſt elapſed. In an early month of it, he bade adieu to an aged and a faithful friend, whom he found ſteady to him in every ſtage of life; and who, without the ties of relationſhip, was a father to him from his childhood.

Such have been the changes of the year which laſt went over us. And though *we* have been hitherto preſerved from *the peſtilence that walketh in darkneſs*, and from *the ſickneſs that deſtroyeth in the noon day*— though we have ſeen *a thouſand fall beſide us, and ten thouſand at our right hand*, what reaſon have we to imagine that we may ſtill continue to trifle without fear of ſurpriſe? Time to come, like that which is paſt, will doubtleſs bring along with it diſtemper and death. Many who now triumph in the full enjoyment of health and ſtrength will be conſigned to the grave before they can add another year to the ſhort term of life. And what

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reaſon has any one man to preſume, that *he* is more likely to eſcape than another? It is not upon the aged and infirm only that the ſtroke of death is permitted to fall. We very often ſee men depart at a moments notice, in the meridian and full career of life. Youth itſelf is nipt in its earlieſt ſpring, and fades away like the untimely bloſſom that leaves behind it no fruit. Even infancy is not ſecure, and often do we ſee that no care is ſufficient to preſerve it.

Thus it appears that procraſtination is in every ſeaſon of life fooliſh and dangerous, and though reflection and amendment are peculiarly neceſſary in thoſe who are ſenſible of the decline of it, they are nevertheleſs a conſiderable part of the duty of all ages. The Almighty, it is evident, purpoſely conceals the time of our departure from us, and puts an end to life in all its ſeaſons, that

we may not, by imagining ourſelves ſecure for the preſent, indulge without bounds in the follies and vices of the world. Were the period of life always fixed, and was man never to quit this world till he had accompliſhed his age of threeſcore and ten years, then might we, without much folly, delay from day to day. We might even venture to poſtpone our good intentions, to the commencement of another and another year. But ſince it is liable to be cut ſhort by ten thouſand accidents, and the young, the mature, and the aged, are indiſcriminately ſummoned before the tribunal of Heaven, to defer for a day is folly, to poſtpone for a year is madneſs.

It is neceſſary, therefore, that we obſerve ſome method in the management of our lives; that we give to every duty its ſeaſon, and punctually diſcharge it, as that ſeaſon comes round. Short as life is, it is nevertheleſs ſufficient for every

every good purpoſe if properly employed. And if we are not careful ſo to employ it, how unjuſtly do we complain of its ſhortneſs. Let us not imagine that if it were lengthened, we ſhould be better able, or more willing to do our duty. What we ſhould do in that caſe, is ſufficiently exemplified by what we now do.

Life, therefore, muſt neceſſarily be conſidered as a wilderneſs of dangers and difficulties, through which we muſt paſs in journeying to the land of promiſe. Upon the land it ſhould be our buſineſs to keep a fixed and ſteady eye, and not to murmur and be diſconcerted at the hardſhips we encounter in approaching it. We ſhould truſt, and not be afraid, for he is faithful that has promiſed, and nothing but our own diſobedience and indolence can defeat us. We ſhould be dutiful and induſtrious, and mark every day

in the ſhort calendar of exiſtence with ſome laudable improvement. So when we bring our years to an end, we ſhall find that though life be indeed but a ſpan long, and paſſes away like a tale that is told, the concluſion of it will be full of glory and honour to ourſelves, and of ſatisfaction to our Maker.

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